

Shrewsbury Fire Department
Gerald F. LaFlamme, Chief
2003 Annual Report

All fire departments exist to extinguish fire. As administrators of public safety, fire personnel must handle fires, crashes, collapses, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and medical emergencies. These events remain, as always, unscheduled and unpredictable. These calamities are time sensitive, life threatening, and labor intensive. You never know when they will occur, but when they do, you need lots of trained and equipped people immediately.

The **Shrewsbury Fire Department** is made up of the Chief, secretary, 32 firefighters, and four Captains. Operations are based at the Church Road Headquarters, with sub stations located at Harrington Avenue and Hartford Turnpike, Route 20. There are two firefighters stationed in the outlying stations and three firefighters and the duty officer at headquarters. One firefighter at headquarters predominantly works as dispatcher, (can respond when needed in certain situations) and one person is usually off-duty with no replacement.

The Fire Department Strategic Plan was shifted forward by a year as the result of fiscal issues in early 2002. The plan calls for eight new employees, a new headquarters building, and establishing eight direct supervisory positions within the department. The supervisory positions will lead to reorganizing the response to calls so as to relieve the Captain from being the sole supervisor of activities of the department.

Four new firefighters have been added to the overall complement in 2003. Michael Rodriguez comes to us from the Springfield Fire Department. Shrewsbury residents Harold “Jamie” Colby III, Brendon Palumbo, and William Ryzewski have been elevated from the on-call section of the fire department to full time employment. Kevin Weigold is a Marine veteran just off active duty. The department is proud of their accomplishments, congratulates them, and anticipates a long prosperous relationship with its newest members.

Safety and accountability of our firefighters is paramount in all that we do. Improving our safety is an ongoing function that is critical for us to succeed safely. The department continues to move forward with the implementation of an Incident Management System . All members of the department are receiving training on this system and the results are increased professionalism, increased proficiency, and most importantly, increased accountability for each other. It has been a costly program but the results are worth far more than the cost.

During the year the department purchased a new accountability system and survival equipment that makes our firefighters as well protected as technology provides today. Shared breathing connections and interactive technology has been added to our self-contained-breathing-apparatus (commonly called SCBA). We now automatically communicate back and forth with the firefighters when they are at greatest risk, inside a burning structure. Using radio channels, we automatically share information on how long the firefighter has been breathing through artificial air source (his SCBA), how much air

he has left, and if he is functioning appropriately. Should he stop moving, stop breathing, or activate a personal alarm, the controller outside the building will go into an alarm state, telling everyone there is a problem inside, who it is, and what the problem is.

The Strategic Plan is now in the third year of implementation. Items being worked on in fiscal 2005 include design of a new fire headquarters, purchase of an aerial platform truck to replace the 1962 ladder truck, creation of four lieutenants positions, and further reorganization of the department.

The new headquarters station will meet many needs. First and foremost is the need to relocate the Edgemere station to the center of the Route 20 area. Explosive growth is currently underway in the southeast quadrant of town, which is presently 8-10 minutes away from fire protection. Better access to Route 140 and South Street from the proposed location will mean better overlapping coverage all across town as well. Appropriate space for the current equipment and equipment-to-come will be built-in. A training area in the form of a classroom and drill yard will be created for the first time within the department. The classroom can be used as a meeting room for the public and a polling/voting area for town elections. The two remaining stations, Harrington Avenue and Church Road (the current HQ) will be retained and some infrastructure work on roofs, electric and plumbing systems will be performed. The ambulance will move to the more central location of Church Road, relieving the overcrowding at the Harrington Ave facility. This package will complete the strategic plan as it refers to plant, serving the town well into the next twenty years plus.

The replacement of the 1962 ladder truck with an aerial platform is a necessity. The new platform will be equipped to do the work of any engine company and have the added capacity to be a ladder. (Currently, every apparatus is an engine, one has added rescue capability, while the ladder has no engine or rescue capability.) This allows for far greater utilization of the ladder which, according to national guidelines is expected to respond to every public building. The current ladder has no pump and is 75 feet tall. The proposed aerial has a pump, water tank, hose, ladder, and work platform, reaching 102 feet. With today's houses set far back on lots, typically three stories tall, this truck is a must. Additional apartment complexes are being and have been built that require the 100 foot reach, including the housing for the elderly on North Quinsigamond Ave and the Southgate senior complex. (We have owned the ladder since before the construction of 36 North Quinsigamond Ave)

Current statistics of activity indicate the department is busier than ever. Our call volume continues to increase. So also increases the number of recurring and required inspections. The fire department inspects every alteration to an oil-fired heating system, every home engaged in any mortgage transaction, every new home, most remodeling projects, every commercial garage. Our computer system is almost complete. This allows accumulation of dynamic information in a manner that can be re-printed at will and carried on the vehicles. The firefighters are surveying EVERY commercial building in town and electronically accumulating data about the properties. The need for such data was clearly expressed in the NIOSH report about the tragic fire in Worcester that claimed six

firefighter's lives. The fire department has teamed up with the building inspector's office to inspect together when appropriate, thus saving duplication of efforts. Many issues have been identified and solved using this dual inspector system. In light of the tragic night club fire in Rhode Island and other note-worthy tragedies across the states, we have stepped up our inspection services and have steadily improved conditions at these venues.

The global information system established within the engineering department is being utilized in the fire service to produce maps and reports about the town properties that the firefighters overlay with information garnered during the surveys. Books are being created containing pictorials of complexes, complete with numbers on buildings, utility locations, hydrant locations, and other special interest information. The NIOSH report on the tragic Worcester Cold Storage Warehouse fire pointed to these types of information as vital to firefighter safety and challenged every fire department to accumulate this information immediately. New construction has slowed but the countering rise in building permits for renovating, remodeling, and adding on has increased the need for inspection services here in the fire department as well.

The department goal to train twenty hours per month is on track. This training includes inspections, classroom, practical applications, and actual calls for service. New defibrillators have been purchased to upgrade our service delivery to include pediatric applications. Training was delivered by company representatives to all members of the department as well as from our Medical Control Officer, Linda Gosselin.

Project Alarm continues to be a great success. Over 350 homes in Shrewsbury have had smoke detectors installed free of charge by the firefighters. During 2002 our firefighters visited 150 homes to install detectors, change batteries, or check systems for our seniors. Semi-annual signup takes place through the council on Aging at the Senior Center. Seniors are encouraged to contact the Fire department if they have no smoke detector protection or if they require battery change-outs. The program is free, due to the generous contribution of detectors by Home Depot, batteries direct from the Energizer Bunny, and the cooperation of the firefighters.

Fire Prevention Education is an important function within the fire department. The Safety Awareness and Fire Education (S.A.F.E.) Program has been delivered through the school system to every elementary student. The SAFE team also delivers age-appropriate safety classes to our seniors. Annually, the firefighters sponsor a cook-out at the Senior Center and serve up burgers, dogs, and safety lessons. The Firefighters Association is to be commended for their monetary generosity toward the SAFE Program as well.

Emergency Responses

Building Fire	95
Vehicle Fire	67
Outside Fire	36
Other Fire	
Odor/Smoke Removal	
Powerline Related	17
Mutual Aid	
Fire Alarm Response	387
Ice/Water Rescue	7
Medical Response	1463
Hazardous Material Response	83
Carbon Monoxide Related	23

Complaint	
Bomb Threat	2
Lock-Out	23
Animal Recsue	8
Wind/Storm/Lightning	
Assist other departments	38
Search for Missing Person	
Good Intent/Public Service	37
All Other	167
Total Emergency Calls for Service	2,453

Inspections Performed

Survey Inspections	250	
New Properties Occupancy Permits	120	
Compliance, w/ Building Inspector		
Food Service	100	
Schools	18	
School Inspections	75	
General Inspections	1000	(est)
Smoke Detectors	1250	
Oil Burners	200	

Permits Issued

Smoke Detector Installation & Inspection	936
Oil burner/Tank Installation & Inspection	151
System Installation & Alterations	10
Compressed Gas (LP) Installations	51
Blasting Permits	17
Underground Tanks	40